

The Church at Colosse

Colossians 1:2 - To the saints and faithful brethren in Christ which are at Colosse: Grace be unto you, and peace, from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Philemon 2 - And to our beloved Apphia, and Archippus our fellow soldier, and to the church in thy house:

Of the churches to which God inspired the apostle Paul to write letters for inclusion in our Bible, two of these churches were churches which were not started by Paul himself, but by others. One of these churches was the church in the city of Rome, and the other was the church which we will consider in this study - the church in the city of Colosse.

The city of Colosse was one of three cities which formed a tri-city area a little more than a hundred miles southeast of the great city of Ephesus (the other 2 of these cities were Laodicea and Hierapolis). It is important to remember that Philemon (to whom one of Paul's epistles was written) lived in the city of Colosse. Let us consider the church at Colosse.

I. The Church

As mentioned above, the church in Colosse was not founded by the apostle Paul; he had never been to the city when he wrote the book of Colossians to the church there (**Col. 2:1**).

The founder of the church in Colosse was a man named Epaphras (**Col. 1:5-7**). Paul refers to Epaphras as his dear fellow servant and a faithful minister of Christ (**Col. 1:7**), as a fervent prayer warrior (**Col. 4:12**), and as Paul's fellow prisoner in Christ Jesus (**Phile. 23**). This godly man Epaphras was used of God to first take the gospel into Colosse and to start the church there. It seems that the following gives a summary of the founding and development of this church:

- (1) Epaphras, it is thought, had been one of the students of the apostle Paul at the school of Tyrannus in the great city of Ephesus (**Acts 19:9-10**)
- (2) Epaphras then took the message of the gospel back to Colosse, where people were saved and the church established (**Col. 1:5-7**) - the church at Colosse was probably founded in the house of Philemon (**Phile. 1-2**), and Epaphras probably also started at least 2 other churches, one in Laodicea and one in Hierapolis (**Col. 4:13**)
- (3) False teachers entered into the church in Colosse and began to teach false doctrine (**Col. 2:4, 8**); this resulted in Epaphras going to see Paul (who was a prisoner in Rome) to report about the Colossian church (**Col. 1:7-8**)
- (4) When Epaphras left Colosse for Rome, Philemon's son Archippus (**Phile. 1:2**) took over as pastor of the church (**Col. 4:17**)
- (5) Epaphras was apparently arrested and imprisoned with Paul at some point while he was in Rome (**Phile. 23**)
- (6) Though imprisoned, Epaphras prayed earnestly for the Colossian church (**Col. 4:12**)

II. The Captive

In the city of Colosse, Philemon owned a servant named Onesimus. Onesimus ran away and ended up in Rome. There he came in contact with the apostle Paul and Paul won him to Christ (as he had previously won Philemon himself to Christ). Paul sent Onesimus back to Philemon, with the book of Philemon to explain what had happened, that Onesimus was now saved and thus not just a servant any longer, but now a brother in Christ, and to request Philemon to receive Onesimus back again (**Phile. 10-19**). Paul also recommends Onesimus to the church as a brother (**Col. 4:9**). The idea that a slave, by faith in Christ, could be brought into a “brother” relationship with his owner was a revolutionary thought in the Roman Empire of the day, but this was Paul’s teaching, and it finally and ultimately blossomed and matured into the idea that “all men are created equal”!

III. The Correspondence

Two of Paul’s letters in the Bible were originally written to Colosse - one to the church and the other to an individual. The church letter is the book of **Colossians** and the personal letter is the book of **Philemon**.

The book of **Philemon** was written concerning the runaway slave Onesimus, and also gives insight into individual and family life in New Testament days.

The book of **Colossians** is a companion book to the book of **Ephesians** (in fact, it is thought that the book of **Ephesians** was sent, not only to the church at Ephesus, but was sent as a circular letter to be read in all the churches of the area, and that it is the book of **Ephesians** that is referred to as “...the epistle from Laodicea” [**Col. 4:16**]). Dozens of the verses that are found in **Ephesians** find very similar counterparts in the book of **Colossians**. The primary difference in the two books is one of emphasis - in **Ephesians**, the emphasis is on “...the church, Which is (Christ’s) body...” (**Eph. 1:22-23**), whereas in **Colossians**, the emphasis is on “...the head of the body...” (**Col. 1:18**), i.e., on Christ Himself. The doctrinal errors which had entered into the church at Colosse (and which Paul deals with in the book of **Colossians**) were a combination of “Judaistic legalism” (**Col. 2:16-17**) and “philosophical, mystical Gnosticism” (**Col. 2:8**). Paul corrects these errors by pointing out (among other things) that the Lord Jesus Christ is pre-eminent in all things (**Col. 1:18**) and that we are complete in Christ (without all the trappings that false religionists would add to Christianity) (**Col. 2:10**).

Conclusion - Problems that existed in Colosse mean that we have two of the great books in our New Testament.